Critical Discourse Analysis of News Reports on China's Bullet-Train Crash

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Abstract

The purpose of critical discourse analysis is to study the relationship between language and the ideology embedded in the text of the dialectical aspect. Critical discourse analysis is an emerging method of discourse analysis, which assimilates the results of multi-disciplinary scientific research in linguistics, psychology, sociology, media studies and so on. It attaches importance to all the non- literary discourses, but it takes news discourses as its main research object. Based on Halliday's three metafunctions, critical discourse analysis in this thesis is done on the basis of news reports about "China's bullet-train crash" collected from Western media. Fairclough's three-dimensional model is adopted in the analysis, including description, interpretation and explanation. The aims of the thesis are to reveal how the Western media construct China's image by using the different linguistic tools, explore the relationship between this constructing mode and big social cultural context, and thus unhidden the ideology embedded behind the social news reports.

Key words: Critical discourse analysis; China's bullet-train crash; Ideology; Three-dimensional model; Western media

INTRODUCTION

In the field of critical discourse analysis (CDA), language is regarded as a form of ideology and linguistic activity is considered as a social practice. Traditionally, linguists only study from academic or theoretical aspect, whereas critical linguists research from a different perspective in order to reveal the relationship between language, power and ideology.

Nowadays, getting news through various media, people believe that news discourse is the faithful recordings of what has happened and they think that journalists always provide them with value-free and unbiased information. However, that is not always the case. It is significant to analyze news through critical discourse analysis. Our thesis is to analyze the news reports on China's Bullet-train Crash in Wenzhou on July 23, 2011 from *The Associated Press (AP)* and *Reuters*. Aiming to reveal the tendency of ideology hidden behind reports, we employ the established framework and a series of analytical devices.

1. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

1.1 Development of CDA

The development of CDA theory can be divided into 4stages. The first stage is from 1976 to 1979. It is in 1979 that *Language and Control* were publicized by Roger Fowler, Gunther Kress and Tony Trew from the University of East Anglia, which gave birth to the concept of CDA. Then this theory experienced its stagnation period between 1979 and 1985 without any works written on it. Later Kress' *Discourses, Texts, Readers and the Pro-nuclear Arguments* (1985) and Fowler's *Linguistic Criticism* (1986) as well as *Notes on Critical Linguistics* (1987) signify the self-reflection period. From 1988to the present day, the theory blooms in the new stage. Many representatives come to the stage, e.g. Norman

Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Van Dijk, Wetherell ,Kress and T. van Leeuwen.

1.2 Approaches to CDA

Norman Fairclough (1989)puts forward the social scientific theories supporting CDA. He insists that language is the primary domain of ideology and has always been the stake in struggles of power. Ruth Wodak works on CDA and he is using the discourse-historical approach and focused on the historical resources and attempts. Van Dijk is known as a researcher of CDA employing the socio-cognitive approach

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE THESIS

2.1 Three-Dimensional Model

In 1995, Fairclough constructs a revised version of his former model in a book entitled *Discourse and Social Change*, as is illustrated below:
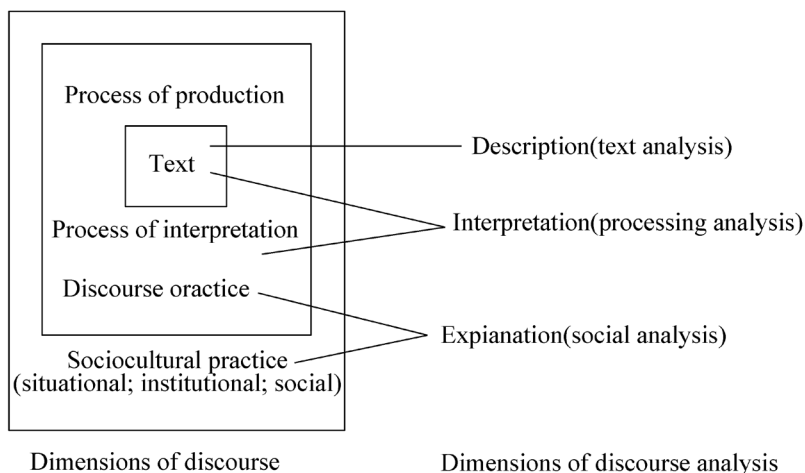
Figure 1
A Three-Dimensional Model of Discourse Analysis

The revised model is consisted of three dimensions. The first dimension is description (text analysis) or discourse-as-text. The second dimension is interpretation (processing analysis) or discourse-as-discursive-practice. The third dimension is explanation (social analysis) or discourse-as-socialcultural-practice. Simply speaking, Fairclough's framework of three-dimensional model of discourse analysis consists of

linguistic description of the language text, interpretation of the relationship between (productive and interpretative) discursive processes and text, and explanation of the relationship between t discursive processes and social processes. A special feature of this approach is that the link between socio-cultural practice and text is mediated by discourse practice. (Fairclough, 1995a, p.97)

Fairclough (1995b, p.34) summarizes the following principles for a critical analysis of the news discourse:

(a) Analysis of discourse should be paid special attention to the manifestation of social, cultural, and political changes in new discourse practices.

(b) The manifestation of both language and texture should be included in the analysis of media texts.

(c) Discourse analysis should include the relations of power and ideology.

(d) Both linguistic analysis and inter-textual analysis should be involved in the analysis of media text.

(e) Texts should be perceived as multifunctional and analyzed accordingly.

(f) All aspects of both language and macrostructure should be involved in linguistic analysis.

(g) Media texts should be conceived in a dialectical relationship with society and culture.

2.2 Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar

Halliday puts forward that language serves three metafunctions: the ideational function, the interpersonal function, and the textual function. The ideational function is a function that serves to express our experience of the external world or the inner world, with ideational meaning mainly realized through classification, transitivity, and transformation. The interpersonal metafunction means that "language is used to interact with other people, to establish and maintain relations with them, to influence their behavior, to express our viewpoint on things in the world." (Thompson, 2000). The textual metafunction "enables the speaker or writer to construct texts or connect passages of discourse that is situational relevant; and enables the listener or reader to distinguish a text from a random set of sentences." (Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p.38).

2.3 Analytic Tools

2.3.1 Lexical Classification

Lexical choice can be considered as the reflection of culture. Therefore, it is important to examine the classification in language to bring out different ideologies

embedded between the lines. The thesis employs "classification", referring to the basic level of language function –lexical choice.

2.3.2 Transformation

Derived from Chomsky's transformational generative grammar, the term "transformation" carries a different meaning. From the point of CDA, the nature of the discourse, context and aim should be taken into account, when referring to this relationship. Besides, transformation also refers to the changing process of ideology in discourse. Meanwhile, critical linguists examine it in order to explore the relationship between language and ideology. In this thesis, two kinds of transformation such nominalization and passivisation will be introduced. Nominalization means that the writer or speaker should have used a verb or verb structure to describe a certain meaning, but he employs noun phrases instead. There are two ways of conversion: One is to convert by adding certain derivational affixes, such as "perception" and "development"; the other is to convert by employing noun phrases to take the place of verb structures, such as "the firing of three officials. Passivization has similar fuction with nominalization. By passivization, the agent is usually removed or placed in the middle or end of sentence. An effect of impersonality is achieved by omitting the participant, agent or patient, which depends on the writer's intention and preference (Bin, 2005).

2.3.3 Transitivity

Transitivity is a system that deals with the clause as a whole, not just the verbs. Besides, it is also a model for dealing with the outside-world experience or inner thoughts in the form of "processes". Three basic elements are involved in this process: the process itself, the participants as well as the circumstances.

2.3.4 Inter-Texuality

According to Fairclough (1992) inter-textuality is basically the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth. By citing what people said, news reporters commit to establish a true picture of what has happened or what was going on. In this way, they spare no efforts to the objectivity and authenticity of the reports so as to enable readers to believe that the news is an objective and authentic reflection of facts. However, production of news reports is more than a process of accumulation of previously delivered speeches or texts. What and how to cite is of great importance for CDA. In practical analysis of news discourse, inter-textuality is realized by examining speech reporting such as news source, mode and verb of reporting. News source is the man or organization whose account is cited or reported by the reporter. As for reporting mode, it can be divided into three types: direct speech, indirect speech and slipping. Reporting verbs are the verbs used by the news reporters when citing others' speeches or account, such as "add", "quote", "cite", "report" and so on.

In this part, the concept of CDA and essential theories in Systematic Functional Grammar (SFG) is introduced. They have the same linguistic foundation: The meaning can be made by choice-making. Discourses are not what they appear at the level of linguistics. Ideology is also planted into the language by this choice-making.
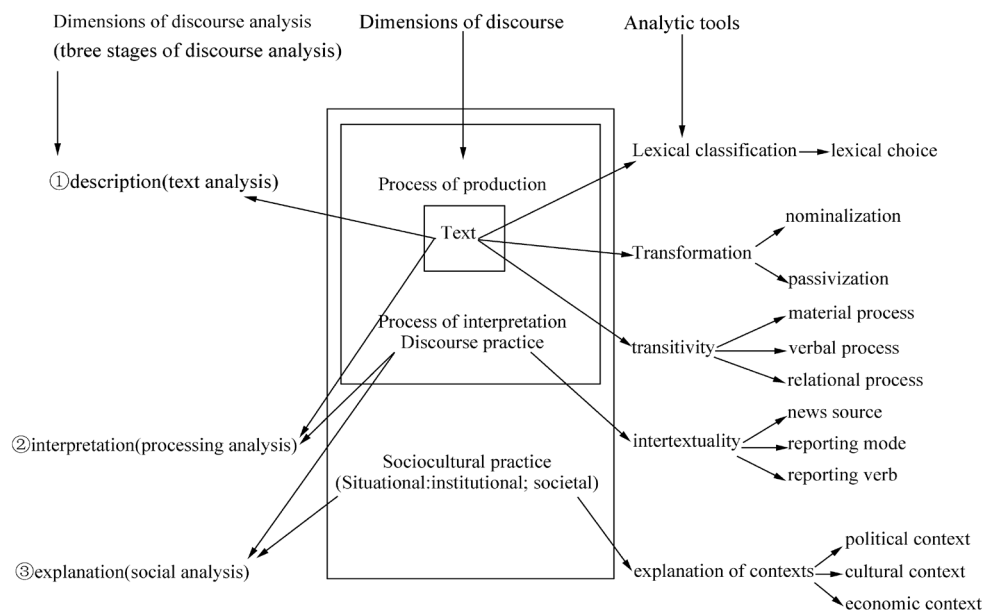
Figure 2
An Overall Model Combining Three-Dimensional Model & SFG

The framework of our thesis is based on the Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA. We should go through three stages in this model: description, interpretation and explanation. SFG is used as the analytical tools for CDA. In order to make it clear, we arrange an overall analysis model, which could be seen in Figure 2. Then a case study of news reports is conducted in the next part.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Sample Selection

In this thesis, we choose The Associated Press and Reuters as the sources

The reason for choosing The Associated Press is that it is the primary global news network based in the United States and one of the top three international news agencies, delivering fast, unbiased news from every corner of the world to all media platforms and formats. Founded in 1846, the AP today is one of the largest and most trusted sources of independent newsgathering.

Its UK counterpart, Reuters is the oldest and most influential news agency providing news and information to the world's media outlets for over 150 years. Reuters has 2,800 journalists on the ground in 200 bureaus around the world. This extensive global reach and access to professional grade news and information enable it to be first with the biggest news and financial stories that move markets. Reuters has established an award-winning reputation for speed, accuracy, and market impact.

3.2 Background Information of the Data

On 23rd July 2011, two high-speed trains collided in the Lucheng District of Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, China. Several carriages of each were derailed. State-run Chinese media confirmed 40 deaths, and at least 192 people were rushed to hospital, including 12 who were severely injured. Chinese President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao called for all-out efforts to rescue passengers. Premier Wen Jiabao visited the scene of the accident, laying a wreath to commemorate the victims.

The Wenzhou train accident caused a public controversy, focused on the safety of China's high-speed rail system. The Wenzhou train collision had an immediate and major effect on China's high-speed rail program. The Chinese government formed a commission to investigate the accident with a directive to report its findings in September 2011. The train crash sparked public anger about the safety of high speed trains in China and on the handling of the accident. Quality and safety concerns will likely have a serious impact on China's efforts to export cheap high speed train technology to other countries.

3.3 Qualitative Analysis of Sample Texts

3.3.1 Description

In thestage,linguistic features oftexts will be examined through lexical classification, transformation and transitivity.

As is discussed in part 3, classification is mainly realized by lexical choice. It is an integral part of the production of ideology in news discourse. By checking the news reports on Chinese bullet-train crash from The Associated Press (AP) and Reuters, the attitudes and positions held by the two international news agencies can be found. The choices of the words certainly influence the way in which readers construct a mental picture of what has happened in the train crash. The readers will naturally follow how the media or the press reports an event. And the contrastive study of the reporting on the same event from two international news agencies will help prove that "linguistic codes do not reflect reality neutrally; they interpret, organize, and classify the subjects of discourse," and reveal the world-views or ideologies (Fowler, 1986, p.27). We try to find if there are striking differences in naming the same event.

Table 1
Lexical Choice on Chinese Media

The Associated Press (AP)	Reuters
State media	
The China Daily	State media
State broadcaster CCTV	State television
The usually staid CCTV network	The People's Daily
	The state-run Xinhua News Agency
The official Xinhua News Agency	The official Xinhua news agency
The usually docile state-controlled media	Communist Party mouthpiece the People's Daily

Example 1. Examples of Classification

(a) Efforts by the propaganda department to **bar** Chinese media from questioning official accounts of the accident fuelled the anger and suspicion, especially about the death toll and rescue efforts.

(b) The **usually staid** China Central Television network raised questions that challenged the government to be more transparent.

(c) Saturday's accident outside the eastern city of Wenzhou prompted an outpouring of anger among the public and even in **the usually docile** state media, with questions posed over the cause of the crash and the government's handling of the aftermath.

As is illustrated in Table1, they almost take the same view towards the Chinese media. These phrases "state media, state television, state broadcaster, the state-run Xinhua news agency, the official Xinhua news agency," are used to address the Chinese media to enhance the credibility of the news reports. The Western reporter's ideology is revealed clearly through the word "staid", "docile" and "bar". Both of "staid" and "docile" are used to describe the Chinese media. The first means "boring and old-fashioned" while the latter "quiet and easy to control". In the Example1. (a), the Western reporter tries to impress the readers that the government from questioning official accounts of the accident especially about the death toll and rescue efforts. It implies that the government controls the media. In the Western reporter's

conception, free speech is not advocated and human rights are not guaranteed in China.

As is discussed in Part 3, transformation is a process of transforming language. In this way, ideology-embedded sentences or phrases become fuzzy or obscure, but it still has an effect on readers' comprehension of the discourse. Thus, it is of great importance to explore transformation and restore the tone originally. Nominalization and passivization are the most commonly used analytical tools. Some examples will be selected and analyzed so as to expose the function and the ideology behind nominalization and passivization.

Example 2. Examples of nominalization

(a) Grieving relatives laid flowers Friday at the site of a deadly Chinese bullet train crash that stirred public anger at authorities over **perceptions** that rapid development was given priority over safety.

(b) The crash has also come to be seen as emblematic of the problems with China's breakneck **development** over the past three decades, sometimes achieved at the expense of public safety and the environment.

Example 2. (a) will be regarded as an illustration of the nominalization functioning in discourses. "Perception" is a noun that transformed from the verb "perceive". The word "Perception" has a meaning of "an idea or belief or an image you have as result of how you see or understand something". The unmarked form of this sentence should be "The deadly Chinese bullet train crash stirred public anger at authorities because the public perceive or believe that rapid development was given priority over safety by the authorities." If reporters choose this sentence, readers will challenge its authenticity: Do the public perceive or believe it that way? The verb "perceive" is transformed into "perception" by the reporter, so a fact has been shown to readers, and the readers have no room to doubt. In Example 2. (b), "development" is a noun and it is transformed from its verb "develop". The form of this sentence that is unmarked should be "China develops at a breakneck speed over the past three decades, sometimes achieved at the expense of public safety and the environment." If reporters choose this unmarked sentence, readers will have a doubt of its authenticity: Does China develop at a breakneck speed over the past three decades? How can you say that? The verb "develop" is transformed into "development" by the reporter, so that a fact is presented to readers without space of negotiation or rejection. In this way, the image of China is depicted that its economy develops at a breakneck speed over the past three decades sometimes achieved at the expense of public safety and the environment.

On the other hand, one function of passivization is to achieve the effect of impersonality by deletion of the agent. The other function is to make the affected thematized by transforming it to the beginning of the information so as to draw special attention.

Example 3. Examples of Passivazition

(a) "Why does the train carriage have to **be buried**? Before identifying the cause of the accident, we should not rule out that the train itself is problematic," CCTV commentator Ma Guangyuan said in a program aired Monday.

(b) Others, though, criticized the safety record of China's **much-hyped** high-speed trains.

(c) Open just one month, the **much-ballyhooed** 820-mile (1,318-kilometer) Beijing-Shanghai line has been plagued by power outages and other malfunctions.

(d) The flagship Beijing-Shanghai high-speed rail line has been plagued by power outages, leaving passengers stranded on stuffy trains for hours at least three times since opening a month ago.

(e) Monday afternoon, more than 20 trains on the high-speed line were delayed due to a power failure, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

(f) But the vast network has **been hit** by a series of scandals in addition to the safety incidents of the past few months.

(g) Rapid expansion of the services has been dogged by concerns about safety, corruption scandals and criticism that schedules are impractical and tickets too expensive for ordinary Chinese.

Example 3. (a) conceals the agent "workers". We can infer that workers used excavators to bury the train carriage, which under order from the government, triggering speculation that the burial was an attempt to cover up evidence. In terms of handling of the wreckage from the crash, the government's transparency is challenged. Example 3. (b) and Example 3. (c) both conceal the agent "the Chinese government". The disapproving verbs "hype" and "ballyhoo" have the same meaning "to advertise something a lot and exaggerate its good qualities, in order to get a lot of public attention to it". Thus, China's high-speed trains and Beijing-Shanghai line are "much-hyped" or "much-ballyhooed" at the cost of public safety, which is examples of irony. In this way, it accused that human right is not guaranteed in China.

In the above four examples from (d) to (g) , the agent are "power outages", "power failure", "concerns about safety", "the safety incidents of the past few months", "corruption scandals" and etc., and their affected are related to Chinese high-speed railway. By passivization, "the vast network", "Rapid expansion of the services", "more than 20 trains on the high-speed line" and "The flagship Beijing-Shanghai high-speed rail line" are transformed to the starring point of the sentences to draw the readers' special attention. According to the theory of transitivity, the agent is found in a prepositional phrase, and it is the circumstance of the clause, not even any of the participants in this action. So fewer responsibilities are shouldered and fewer challenges are faced.

Transitivity analysis is a process of marking participants, processes and circumstances (Halliday, 1994). The rank of clause is the basis of the analysis.

Finite clauses, non-finite clauses and embedded clauses are analyzed. Of all samples, five hundred and forty eight processes are analyzed.

Table 2
Distribution of Process Types in AP and Reuters

Process type	Reuters		AP		Total	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Material	156	63.67%	208	68.65%	364	66.42%
Verbal	52	21.22%	57	18.81%	109	19.89%
Relational	26	10.61%	32	10.56%	58	10.58%
Mental	4	1.63%	5	1.65%	9	1.64%
Behavioral	4	1.63%	0	0	4	0.73%
Existential	3	1.22%	1	0.33%	4	0.73%

According to the table, it can be easily seen that material process occupies the most percentage and it falls other processes far behind. That is because material process is commonly used to describe the occurrence and development of events. The data of this thesis are China's bullet train crash and this case needs vivid portrayal, so the material process takes up the most percentage. Verbal process is the second, which occupies 19.89%. The third is relational process and the fourth is mental process. Behavioral and existential processes are not easily seen, both of which enjoy little percentage.

3.3.2 Interpretation

Interpretation refers to text production and interpretation of discourse. It is a stage that "corrects delusions of autonomy on the part of subjects in discourse. It makes explicit what for participants is generally implicit" (Fairclough, 1989, p.162). This stage mainly talks about the intertextuality of texts. In practical analysis of news discourse, it is realized by examining speech reporting such as news source, reporting mode and reporting verb. As is discussed in part three, three main approaches are used in the analysis of news source in news discourse, and they are definite news source, indefinite news source and no news source.

Table 3
Distribution of News Sources in AP and Reuters

News source	Reuters		AP		Total	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Definite news source	13	33.33%	9	19.57%	22	25.88%
Indefinite news source	26	66.67%	37	80.43%	63	74.12%
No news source	0	0	0	0	0	0

Our thesis analyzes the samples and we come to the numbers in the table above. Twenty-two news sources are clearly presented, accounting for a percentage of 25.88%. Sixty-three news sources are indefinite, occupying a percentage of 74.12%. Every reporting has news sources

The samples are chosen from authoritative International news agency, so each reporting has its definite or indefinite news source. There is an explicit rule that news sources should be as clear as possible in most news agencies, for it is used to protect news agencies themselves in order to avoid legal disputes. In fact, there is more indefinite news source than definite one. But the categorization depends whether the name of the speaker is shown. So news sources like the following examples are ascribed into the second category.

Example 4. Examples of Indefinite News Source

(a) **The Ministry of Railways said** in a statement on Sunday that the first four carriages of the moving train and the last two carriages of the stalled train derailed.

(b) **The Wenzhou city government said** more than 1,000 people participated in the rescue operation.

(c) **The Railways Ministry said** in a statement on its website that all local railway bureaus were to draw lessons from Saturday's accident in the eastern city of Wenzhou and immediately launch safety inspections.

Although no speaker's name is mentioned in the reporting, the source reaches clearness by using the name of the company or the Ministry, for the speaker represents his organization. Or to say, the organizations are important to the readers. However, readers can also encounter implicit news sources.

(d) **Family members and media commentators had complained t**he original amount was low, particularly given the money to the powerful Railway Ministry collects from insurance premiums built into ticket prices.

(e) **Victims' families have complained** that ministry officials have discussed only compensation while avoiding the issue of responsibility.

(f) **Chinese reporters and bloggers have questioned** the apparent quick decision to clean up the crash site. Images of excavators pushing the wreckage into pits circulated widely on the Internet, triggering speculation that the burial was an attempt to cover up evidence.

(g) **Media and online commentators have questioned** the official explanation for the accident and called for an independent investigation excluding ministry experts.

(h) On the popular Twitter-like site **Sina Weibo users posted millions of messages, many questioning** official explanations and circulating amateur photographs and videos of the crash site.

(i) **Critics say** tickets are costly and the services do not really meet the needs of average travelers in many areas.

(j) **Others**, though, **criticized** the safety record of China's much-hyped high-speed trains.

(k) While **many relatives said** they were happy with the concern the government was giving the crash, they put the blame on local officials and the Railways Ministry for what they saw as dismal crisis management.

The above news sources are indefinite. The word "many" give readers a sense that the number is large. In addition to that, "media commentators" and "Chinese reporters" are professionals and authorities while "Victims' families" is the persons concerned. The Western reporter has the right to decide from whom to quote. However, readers believe that their argument and analysis are credible. Nevertheless, it is impossible to know who are those "Media or online commentators" and "Chinese reporters or bloggers", so the reporter's idea is stressed with a shield. They transfer the ideology in a tricky way.

3.3.3 Explanation

In Fairclough's three-dimensional model, explanation is the final stage. The explanation of social context is needed at this stage to uncover the ideology hidden in the language uses and make the relationship of language, power and ideology clear.

The deadliest high-speed train accident took place near the village of Eschede in Celle district of Lower Saxony, Germany, on June 3, 1998. It claimed 101 lives. It is worth going back to the news reports from that time. International news agencies and newspapers expressed shock and sympathy, and tried to analyze the disaster.

Let's move to Wenzhou in China's Zhejiang province, the scene of the bullet train accident on the night of July 23 in which 39 people were killed. It was an accident, terrible and regrettable, but definitely not extraordinary. In the month preceding the Wenzhou tragedy, train accidents killed several people in the US, including 6 in Nevada on June 24, one in Maine on July 12 and two near Chicago

on July 21. On July 10, the Kalka Mail derailed in Uttar Pradesh, India, killing about 70 people.

Yet no one ran the accidents as top international stories and no one questioned the entire European, American or Indian system because of failed safety systems or faulty tracks. Objectivity is not something that the Western media have in mind when covering events in China. Immediately after the accident, Western and Japanese propaganda went to work. Many Western reports were tailored to show that what had happened in China was something exceptional, which could rarely happen anywhere else in the world.

Politically, western countries represented by the United States have never ceased to put forth "China Threat Theory" and made judgments on major events in China on the basis of the differences of political system between the two countries. China is a socialistic country while the United States is a country based on capitalism. Because of the Cold War, the American people had an impression that countries with a communist system are aggressive. In light of their democratic standards, China's system is not perfect. For some American scholars, China's communist system has problems and the government lacks the permission of pluralistic social powers.

Culturally, the different religious beliefs would be a reason to make the Chinese excluded by the mainstream of the American society. American culture and its value system have a great impact on the way of decoding other counties. On one hand, they have a national superiority that they are "God's chosen people" and Chinese people are thought to be those who have to be saved. On the other hand, the American ideology is based on the three backbones: freedom, law and technology. They take it for granted that the truth of the world is in their hands. Therefore, the US media always judges of things on the basis of their own ideology and unscrupulously blame China.

Economically, China ranks since 2010 as the world's 2nd largest economy after the United States. It has been the world's fastest-growing major economy, with consistent growth rates of around 10% over the past 30 years. China is also the largest exporter and second largest importer of goods in the world. However, the economy of Western countries represented by USA has developed slowly, and even has been in stagnation or retrogression in the past few years. In a background of globalization, economic communications of China and the Western countries increase, deep and wide. In the long run, they have common economic interests. There are no other two countries that have an economic relationship of the same importance throughout the world. However, a good cooperation is still entangled with many problems, such as trade balance, exchange rate, climate changing and intellectual property rights. China has spent billions of dollars and plans more massive investment to develop its high-speed rail network, and is trying selling its trains

or technology to Latin America, the Middle East, USA, Russia, and other countries, which is a "threat" to the Western countries. Many Western reports were tailored to discredit China's economic system and its high-speed railway, in order to make the export of its high-speed railway impossible. The Wenzhou train collision had an immediate effect on China's high-speed rail program. Objectively speaking, the accident did cast a shadow on Chinese railway to some extent, gave the western countries an excuse to discrediting China's image.

CONCLUSION

All in all, we can summarize the findings as follows:

Firstly, after detailed analysis of the eight news reports, the author draws the conclusion that news as a product of social practice, although claimed as objective and fair discourse, is inevitably influenced by ideology. Western media tried different linguistic means to build China's negative image in this issue. Western media did not attack China directly, but the attacks and ideologies are hidden between lines. Secondly, it is found that lexical classification is the most effective tool to reveal the embedded-ideologies between the lines, while transitivity and transformation ranks in the second and the third place.

Thirdly, after explanation of political, economic and cultural contexts, it found that many Western reports were tailored to discredit China's achievements, its economic or political system, and its high-speed railway, in order to make it impossible for China to export its high-speed railway or related technology.

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